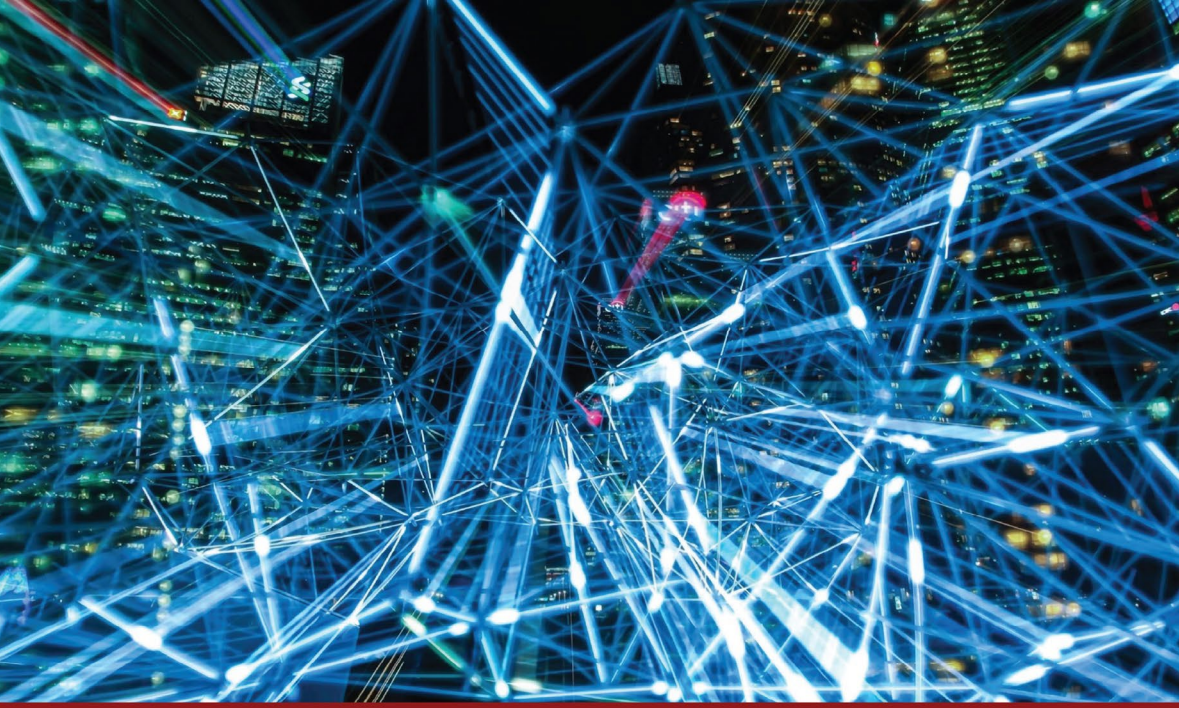

Ethics of *Socially Disruptive Technologies*

An Introduction

Edited by
Ibo van de Poel,
Lily Frank, Julia Hermann,
Jeroen Hopster, Dominic Lenzi,
Sven Nyholm, Behnam Taebi, and
Elena Ziliotti

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2. Social Media and Democracy

Lead author: *Elena Ziliotti*[1]
Contributing authors: *Patricia D. Reyes Benavides, Arthur Gwagwa, Matthew J. Dennis*

Has social media disrupted the concept of democracy? This complex question has become more pressing than ever as social media have become a ubiquitous part of democratic societies worldwide. This chapter discusses social media's effects at three critical levels of democratic politics (personal relationships among democratic citizens, national politics, and international politics) and argues that social media pushes the conceptual limits of democracy. This new digital communication infrastructure challenges some of the fundamental elements of the concept of democracy. By giving citizens and non-citizens equal substantive access to online political debates that shape the political agenda, social media has drastically expanded and opened up the notion of demos and the public sphere (the communicative space where citizens come together to form and exchange opinions and define collective problems), and misaligned the conceptual relationship of the public sphere with the idea of demos. These conclusions have multiple implications. They indicate engineers' and designers' new political responsibility, novel normative

1 All mentioned lead authors and contributors contributed in some way to this chapter and approved the final version. EZ is the lead author of this chapter. She coordinated the contributions to this chapter and did the final editing. She wrote the first version of Sections 2.3, 2.4 and parts of sections 2.2 and 2.1. PR wrote the first version of part of Section 2.2. and contributed to and commented on all the other sections. AG wrote the first version of part of Section 2.2. and contributed to, and commented on Sections 2.1 and 2.4. MD wrote the first version of Section 2.1 and contributed to the final editing of the chapter.

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challenges for research in political and moral philosophy, security and legal frameworks, and ultimately they shed light on best practices for politics in digital democratic societies.

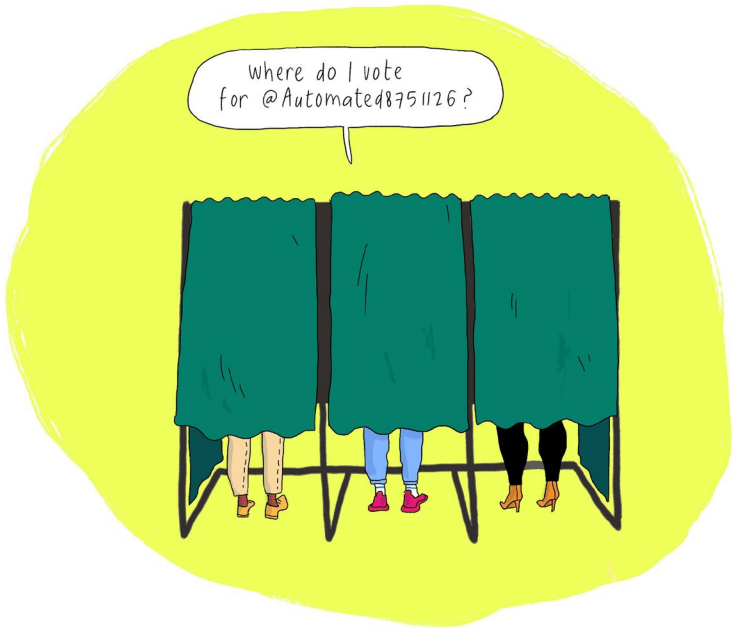

Fig. 2.1 Voting machines. Credit: Menah Wellen

2.1 Introduction

Social media involves technologies associated with Web 2.0. Whereas Web 1.0 technologies divided *retrieving information* and *communication* into independent tasks, Web 2.0 technologies combine these processes. This gives rise to one of social media's quintessential features: hosting user-generated content which can be easily accessed and commented on by other users. Take Facebook's newsfeed, for example. This newsfeed combines the users' ability to comment on other users' posts,

the algorithmic sorting of the content by recommender systems (i.e. microtargeting), and the ability of the post's author to comment on the reactions their post has generated.

These features of social media are now ubiquitous, but they are strikingly recent. *Six Degrees* is often credited as the first social media website. It was created a mere 30 years ago, in 1997. Despite this, social media now permeates many aspects of life such as work and career, dating, culture, spiritual wellness, friendship, and family relationships. Even governments often have social media pages, allowing users to get updates or to communicate with their members. Given the wide spread of social media, one might expect that social media has affected the democratic process and politics in general. For example, it is hard to imagine how a political election could occur today without significant use of social media technologies.

While social media has certainly added much value to today's political process, it also introduces new and unprecedented ethical challenges. It has the potential to improve both the quantity and quality of information that voters have at their disposal, allowing voters to share and communicate relevant information with other voters and facilitating political candidates' and other interest groups' communication with those they hope to persuade to vote for them. These opportunities for democratic engagement seemed to have multiplied when the first wave of widely used social media platforms by politicians grew exponentially in the early 2000s. Since that time, political parties who wish to represent traditionally disenfranchised voters could directly communicate with them. It was hoped that increasing interest in politics via social media would galvanize interest in the ballot box and other forms of civic activism. This can, for example, be seen in the run-up to the US presidential election in 2008 in which the Obama campaign made effective use of newly created social media accounts to mobilize many voters who previously had been politically disconnected (Smith, 2009).

Social media was not the only factor driving this. Obama's original political mandate and the progressive promise of electing the first Black president in US history played a vital role. Nevertheless, Obama's campaign made use of a growing interest in social media and targeting specific voters with relevant political content. However, the potential adverse effects of using social media in this way quickly became

apparent. For progressives, the skillful deployment of these technologies by Obama's electoral team promptly turned into a cautionary tale.

Today's debates on social media and democracy spotlight the dual focus on the benefits and threats of technological developments. In particular, discussions often focus on the impact of algorithm decision-making systems in amplifying the scope of human action as well as their threats in conjunction with democracy, broadly understood in its deliberative form but also affecting individual and group rights such as privacy, expression, and association.

This chapter explores the relationship between social media and democracy from multiple perspectives. First, it dissects these interactive technologies' social disruptions in democratic societies (Section 2.2). We argue that social media's effects are visible at three critical levels of democratic politics: at the level of personal relationships among democratic citizens, at the level of national politics, and the level of international politics. These empirical reflections offer the background against which we explore social media's disruption of some of the fundamental elements of the concept of democracy (Section 2.3). We argue that as a new digital communication infrastructure, social media disrupts the idea of the public sphere, drastically exposing citizens' opinion formation to global political dynamics. Furthermore, quantitative and qualitative changes to the public sphere pose a conceptual challenge to our notion of demos, the very essence of democratic rule. Finally, we explore the implications of social media-driven disruption of democracy. This final section assesses the implications of social media-driven democracy's disruption for engineers' and designers' responsibility in society, for political and moral philosophy, for security and legal frameworks, and for political methodology (Section 2.4).

2.2 Impacts and social disruptions

What are social media's impacts and disruptive effects on democratic societies? As stated earlier, we identify this technology's impacts and social disruptions at three critical levels, starting with personal relationships among democratic citizens. In the past decade, researchers across disciplines have noted that social media has an unprecedented ability to radically change citizens' informational ecosystem. One

important consequence is that social media transforms how users perceive political problems and formulate the political issues around them.[2] Such a process can have both harmful and beneficial effects on democracy. For instance, the platforms' algorithmic curation, which organizes the information in users' feeds, can distort users' understanding of the diversity of voices in a public debate, generating filter bubbles to increase users' engagement (Pariser, 2011). Then again, social media platforms afford the sharing of audio-visual content in real-time, which gives users richer insights into how others may be experiencing a common issue of concern.

Beyond how users may interpret political issues through social media platforms, these technologies disrupt the potential pathways for citizens' political engagement and action in democratic societies. The affordances of these technologies present citizens with new possibilities and limitations in their democratic practices. The possible ways for citizens to state their opinion, engage in public debates, campaign for a candidate or policy, bring awareness to an issue, or even mobilize fellow citizens have been disrupted by social media platforms. The shaping of these practices through technologies can be understood as a 'circumscribed creativity' (Zeng and Abidin, 2021) because it concerns how the features of various platforms define users' political practices in the digitalized public sphere. For instance, social media platforms' specific qualities shape how users can agree or disagree with a political stance. These features range from direct emoji reactions (e.g. the heart, sad, surprised, angry reactions on Facebook) to re-sharing, tagging, commenting, and the most recent remixing of original content (available on platforms like TikTok). Platforms may also limit content in terms of characters (when text-based) or time (when audio/visual-based). Therefore, they often push users to cram and communicate complex ideas in short bits. These examples of circumscribed creativity suggest that social media introduces distinct and qualitatively new ways for citizens' political interactions.

Although most literature on the role of social media platforms in democracy associates them with the power they wield in public life, just like in their nascent stage, they constitute places for users

2 This process has been coined *political hermeneutics* and it stems from an understanding of technologies as mediating their users' access to the world (Verbeek, 2020).

to connect, share entertainment, discuss popular culture, and stay in touch with each other's day-to-day lives. In private and public life alike, the platform algorithms shape how agents 'access information, communicate with and feel about one another, debate fundamental questions of the common good, and make collective decisions' (Simons and Gosh, 2020: 1). A nexus can therefore be observed between the roles of 'private' and 'public' in the life of a social media user. For instance, through nudges such as suggestions to like particular pages and befriend specific individuals, social media algorithms expand circles of human interaction and repertoire of choices, enabling freedom of expression, choice, and association, all fundamental to democratic decisions.

However, the same capabilities can also fragment users. The individual and group choices that occur in the context of the interplay between data and platform algorithms can give rise to new interactive social agents or algorithms. These, together with the technical rules that manage users' interaction with the other elements of the system, constitute sociotechnical systems (Van de Poel, 2020). However, the sociotechnical systems within social media platforms carry values, commercial motives, and political intentions. These do not just affect individual private decisions but can also influence society's ability to exercise collective decision-making.

This raises the question of social media's influence on democratic national politics, the second level of societal disruption we identify. What characterizes democratic government is citizens' more or less direct involvement in the decision-making process. However, for citizens to develop informed preferences that represent their actual needs and political views, they must have access to reliable and effective epistemic shortcuts and trustworthy information sources (Spiekermann and Goodin, 2018; Christiano, 2015). Because social media lowered the cost of information production and circulation, the number of sources on which citizens rely to form beliefs has significantly increased. As a consequence, the criteria through which traditional media established epistemic authority (e.g. editorial oversight, fact checking) have weakened (Farrell and Schwartzberg, 2021). For instance, the new communicative system allows virtually anyone on social media to be a publisher or a republisher (Farrell and Schwartzberg, 2021: 212).

This had both positive and negative consequences. On the one hand, it gave more voice to independent journalism and underrepresented and non-mainstream groups; on the other, it led to an increasingly polarized electorate (Sunstein, 2017). Debates about polarizing topics on social media tend to have low epistemic value, failing to achieve the 'wisdom of the crowd', (Sullivan et al., 2020) which has raised suggestions for new epistemic norms for sharing information online (Sullivan and Alfano, 2022). Algorithmic-based information selection can downgrade non-alarming material while directing users to more alarming information to maximize engagement (Farrell and Schwartzberg, 2021: 197). This polarizing effect is problematic for democratic national politics because, as we have learned, access to reliable and neutral information is critical for citizens to form beliefs and exercise their political rights in an informed way. Furthermore, polarization erodes the chances for constructive political debates. Changing the algorithm defining users' information visualization may limit social media's polarization effect. However, this is insufficient to address another troubling consequence of social media, which is that political leaders have acquired an unprecedented opportunity to directly reach out to voters bypassing traditional gatekeepers of democratic political communication, such as political parties (Makhortykh et al., 2021). Such consequence creates an unbalance of power by significantly increasing the political influence of political leaders while diminishing the relevance of political parties and other political agencies.

At this point, we identify the third level of social disruption in international politics: the transnational nature of social media platforms is challenging democratic states' ability to uphold digital borders alongside physical ones. The digital revolution, driven by the internet's diffusion and via social media platforms, has resulted in public discourses and criticisms becoming increasingly transnational with ramifications for various forms of democracy, whether deliberative or electoral.

With more than half of the world's population using global-reaching social media, communication across cultures has become more accessible and frequent (Boamah, 2018). This development has facilitated information dissemination, interpersonal communication, and the flow, sharing, infiltration, and transfer of various cultural elements worldwide

(Carey, 2008). Furthermore, this does not only apply to what individuals share themselves. The algorithms that empower social media create new forces that drive the flow of information in the public sphere (Simons and Ghosh, 2020). This leads the public sphere to become a cross-cultural discursive space, where strangers with little knowledge of each other's socio-cultural background rub shoulders.

Under such conditions, both dangers and advantages can be observed. On one hand, there is the potential for the intensification of conflict when different cultural backgrounds meet. Consider, for instance, the role that social media played in shaping the reaction to the terrorist attacks on the French magazine *Charlie Hebdo*. Sumiala, Tikka, and Valaskivi (2019) performed an analysis on the conversation unfolding on Twitter right after the incident became viral online. They found that the immediacy of reactions across the world (e.g. the global deliberation in 'real time') afforded by the platform incited users to make sense of the events through stereotypical narratives and mythologizations of cultural positions, arousing animosity between secular and Muslim groups.

On the other hand, the technological conditions that enable digital communication across cultures can also inspire necessary transcultural political action. Consider Iran's Green revolution, Hong Kong's Umbrella Movement (Liu, 2021), or Indigenous social movements such as the EZLN (Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional), Idle No More, and the Rio Yaqui water rights movement (Duarte, 2017). These examples reveal the significance of digital tactics for local political organization, but they are also a testament to how social media has enabled cross-border solidarity. This is especially the case where such surges of political action touch upon issues and concerns widely shared across national boundaries, such as human rights violations, gender violence, wealth inequality, or climate change.

Notably, transnational mobilizations illustrate the disruption of older strategies for collective action. Transnational political mobilizations such as the Arab Spring, the Occupy movement and the more recent environmental networks such as Fridays for Future or Extinction Rebellion have brought to light the possibility of emerging collectives that did not need formal organization nor centralized resources to mobilize millions of citizens across nations and exert substantial

political impact. Such phenomena have led some scholars to conclude that collective action was being substituted by *connective action*, a mode of mobilization characterized by digitally networked action in which social media enable individuals' personalized engagement and grant them freedom to interpret the collective's identity in accordance to each citizen's unique context (Bennett and Segerberg, 2013).

These considerations indicate that the transnational public sphere, now mostly centralized in private social media companies, has begun to play a significant role in shaping both local and global democratic politics. By facilitating an unprecedented global sharing of information and ideas, private social media companies own some of the most potent means by which active citizens in global civil society organize themselves today. Private social media platforms have become gatekeepers of expression that may excite contagious political emotions (Steinert and Dennis, 2022) and knowledge — or incite hatred, discrimination, violence, harassment, and abuse (Kaye, 2018). This raises significant worries because, for democratic institutions to endure, 'no entity, whether private corporations or social groups, could be permitted to acquire unfettered power to shape the public sphere or stifle the possibilities of collective action' (Simons and Ghosh, 2020: 2).

Helberger (2020) argues that instead of perceiving platforms as intermediaries and facilitators of the speech of others, they should be viewed as active political actors in their own right and wielders of considerable opinion power. Although Helberger and others make these claims in the domestic context, the impact and policy implications have been increasingly felt across national borders in the last decade, with the real danger of platforms becoming private sovereigns of the digital world to such a point of being accepted as political collaborators by governments (Cohen, 2019-a: 236; Cohen, 2019-b). Despite claiming a global status in their operation and normative influence, the platforms, primarily the US-based ones, resist falling under the governance of international human rights law. Jørgensen and Pedersen (2017: 95) maintained that in virtue of the importance of their services, corporations like Google have 'an extra obligation to respect human rights standards'. Although the activities of non-state actors are generally not governed by international law, except in limited instances, Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) applies

in part to private actors such as businesses. For instance, according to the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, private actors have the responsibility to respect international human rights. This includes avoiding causing harm as well as preventing and mitigating human rights impacts (UNHRC, 2011). The covenant rights apply whether there is an 'interference' with protected liberty or not. Specifically, under the gatekeeper theory, some intermediaries may have special responsibilities by virtue of their dominance, status, or influence on democratic discourse and democracy (Laidlaw, 2015).

2.3 Conceptual disruption

As illustrated in the previous section, social media has the potential to disrupt fundamental norms and practices both within democratic societies and between democratic societies and foreign actors (e.g. NGOs, foreign governments, multinationals, foreign private companies). However, social media's disruptive power is also conceptual; it can disrupt some of the core concepts through which philosophers and political scientists understand and assess democratic politics. As we saw in the introduction of this book, conceptual disruptions challenge the typically intuitive and unreflective applications of our concepts. This section evaluates how social media challenges critical conceptual elements of the idea of democracy.

Democracy is a complex and contested concept as philosophers have developed different conceptions of democracy (e.g. liberal democracy, representative democracy, deliberative democracy, participatory democracy, contestatory democracy). For the purpose of this chapter, it is important to consider two main kinds of conceptions of democracy: institutional and social. Institutionally, democracy refers to a set of institutions that aim to ensure the self-government of free and equal citizens. The institutional dimension of democracy is well represented by periodic general elections through which citizens can choose their political representatives. Socially, democracy stands for a way of life, a certain way through which members of the same society live together. This dimension of democracy is well-represented by a vibrant civil society. To make things more complicated, the ideal of democracy, no matter how contested this is, is also interconnected with various

different concepts. This is already evident in the institutional conception of democracy, where the ideas of 'self-government', 'freedom', 'human rights', 'freedom of expression', and 'equality' are brought to the fore. Due to space limitations, this chapter focuses on two of the most fundamental conceptual elements of democracy: *democratic public sphere* and *demos*, and illustrates how social media destabilizes these two conceptual elements.

Among all conceptual elements characterizing the concept of democracy, the *public sphere* is the most critical concept that is challenged by social media. The idea of a public sphere is central to most conceptions of democracy; it represents the realm in which citizens develop their views on public matters and choose among options through communicative means of information transfers and exchange (Habermas, 1974). These public opinions, developed through deliberative public spaces, allow citizens to articulate collective problems and assess possible solutions. As a novel communicative infrastructure, social media gives the vast majority of democracy's citizens an unprecedented opportunity to participate in communicative political actions at almost negligible access cost and through a user-friendly structure. Of course, language barriers remain an important hindrance in some cases to a person's involvement in the politics of another country. However, as we have learned in the preceding section, adopting social media as a prominent avenue of communication among citizens has drastically extended democracies' public spheres beyond national borders.

This change represents a critical conceptual disruption of democracy. Although hardly any real social sphere has ever been free of international influences, the seemingly radical openness of the digital public sphere afforded by social media is genuinely unprecedented. Through these technologies, individuals outside of the geographies that usually delimit a democratic society have increasing opportunities to join the political discussions and conversations of citizens geographically located within the democratic community. This phenomenon has imposed a drastic expansion and openness of the public sphere, at the very least, quantitatively. Under these new circumstances, where national boundaries are blurred and geographical differences are irrelevant, where is the public sphere? Are there multiple public spheres, or is it more reasonable to talk about one unique global public sphere? In this

regard, media scholar Ingrid Volkmer proposed to reconceptualize the fundamental aspect of the concept of public sphere to ensure that such concept is attuned and suitable for the political conditions brought by globalization (Volkmer, 2014).

Quantitative and qualitative changes to the public sphere also pose a conceptual challenge to another fundamental conceptual feature of democracy: *demos*. This Greek word initially referred to the political community or the citizens living within the democratic city-state who participate in the business of government. As democracy came to represent a political order of countries, the citizens' participation in government became more indirect, and the notion of demos came to refer to 'the people' or, more precisely, all the citizens of the democratic country.

The social disruptions laid out in the previous section challenge the conceptual limits of the concept of demos. We witness a conceptual misalignment between the concept of public sphere (international) and the concept of demos (national). The citizens of a given democracy are no longer the only agents who can significantly influence government business, considering the systematic openness of the digital infrastructure and the significant foreign political influences in the democratic political space and the increasing collaboration and solidarity among grassroots social movements across borders. These fundamental political changes raise the question of whether Abraham Lincoln's idea that a democracy is 'a government of the people, by the people and for the people' is achievable in the digital area. Can democracy be a government by the people, if citizens and non-citizens (e.g. single individuals but also private companies, NGOs, etc.) have equal access to the online political debates which shape a democratic society's political agenda? Of course, as we said before, this phenomenon is not unique to the digital age since hardly any real social sphere has ever been free of international influences. Democratic societies have always been decision-making systems open to foreign influences. But our point is not openness per se, but rather the unprecedented degree of this openness by virtue of social media and more generally the digital condition. This radical change is conceptually intriguing because it puts pressure like never before on the link between the concept of public sphere and the concept of demos.

The pressure on the conceptual limits of the concept of demos is critical for pragmatist and relational democratic theorists, who understand democracy primarily as a culture or way of life (Kolodny, 2014; Scheffer, 2014; Anderson, 1999; Anderson, 2009). For instance, according to John Dewey,

> [A]merican democratic polity was developed out of genuine community life, that is, association in local and small centers where industry was mainly agricultural and where production was carried on mainly with hand tools. [...] The township or some not much larger area was the political unit, the town meeting the political medium, and roads, schools, the peace of the community, were the political objectives. The state was a sum of such units, and the national state a federation—unless perchance a confederation—of states. (Dewey, 1946: 111)

For Dewey, shared experiences developed in democratic community life are necessary for personal cultivation. But the globalization of valuable shared experiences through social media raises the question of whether democratic life as Dewey intended is still possible today.

This question is not only relevant for debates in Western political philosophy, but also for the prospect of non-Western democratic theories. For instance, within the field of Confucian political theory, several scholars, such as David Hall, Roger Ames, Tan Sor-hoon, and Sungmoon Kim, argue that while Western-liberal style democracy is incompatible with the Confucian tradition, Confucian intellectual traditions can support a conception of democracy as a way of life which is based on community-shared experiences (Hall and Ames, 1999; Tan, 2003; Kim, 2017; Kim 2018). These scholars have attempted to reconstruct a Confucian view of democracy precisely by emphasizing the striking normative similarities between Dewey's understanding of democracy and the Confucian belief that individual cultivation is primarily a community enterprise.

2.4 Looking forward

The disruptive effects of social media on democracy is pervasive and has four major repercussions: it has implications for engineers and designers' responsibility in society, for political and moral philosophy, for security and legal frameworks, and for political methodologies.

The expansion of the public sphere on digital platforms has made social-media engineers' and designers' choices politically laden. For example, consider the debates about whether fostering the original vision of a decentralized, open network or countering disinformation can be solved simply by implementing better algorithms or whether it requires governmental regulation. The pursuit of one of these choices could change how political debates are shaped and regulated. The same applies to decisions on other social media design features, such as the space limit of users' posts and users' ways of reacting to posts or storing content. As we have learned, these design choices have repercussions on how the citizens of a democratic society develop their political preferences. This is an important consideration, given that most of the debate on the philosophy of engineering has concentrated on the ethical responsibility of engineers, paying little attention to the political implications of engineering activities.

Some may argue that because engineers' and designers' choices are politically laden they must be controlled by democratic institutions representative of the citizens. On this point, Josh Simons and Dipayan Gosh maintain that since digital platforms provide the digital fora in which citizens learn and discuss politics, the discussion of Big Tech companies' key policy developments and implementations must involve citizens' juries (Simons and Ghosh, 2020: 14). While this participative proposal may be a partial solution, representative democracy allows for the presence of institutions that are insulated from direct electoral accountability if these agencies work towards democratic ends (e.g. the U. S. Supreme Court). From this perspective, it may be argued that the main reason for social media's negative influence on democratic politics may not be the lack of direct democratic accountability in Big Tech companies but rather the absence of effective regulation and uniform rules to define qualified information sources and epistemic authorities (Zuboff, 2019). Thus, one partial solution for democratic societies can be the development of public regulations for the privately-owned infrastructures of the digital public sphere while ensuring sufficient space for underrepresented voices. However, one challenge to this solution is that digital infrastructures cross national borders, connecting geographically distant users. Under these conditions, any democratic regulation risks being ineffective because it cannot regulate information

production outside its national boundaries. Hence, an effective political response to the disruption of social media on national democratic politics can be only global.[3]

Besides implications for engineers' and designers' responsibility, social media's disruption of central conceptual elements of democracy (such as demos and self-government) has a significant impact on democratic theory. It indicates that scholars aiming at creating relevant normative models for contemporary democratic societies around the world must engage with the effects of technologies on contemporary democratic societies. Refusing to do so risks creating action guidance out of touch with how democratic politics works in reality. This conclusion is also relevant for political and legal philosophers whose research is not centered on democracy because social media's disruption extends to other fundamental political and legal concepts than democracy. Consider the division between 'private' and 'public' in the Western liberal tradition. On the one hand, there is the division between the universal public political realm, and on the other, there is the particular, private domain of needs and desires (Young, 2007: 108). However, the ability of social media to make public what traditionally were considered 'private' aspects of individuals challenges the liberal philosopher to rethink the dichotomy between the private and the public. Furthermore, social media platforms challenge political philosophers to rethink their distributive models of power and rights and examine the non-distributive issues of justice such as institutional decision making and culture, going beyond the distributive paradigm in favor of a broader, process-oriented understanding of society (Young, 2011: 33).

Social media-driven conceptual disruption is also relevant for moral philosophers. Social media challenges the practicability of some Western traditional conceptions of moral reasoning that seek to distinguish people's subjective lived experiences from the public, impersonal, and impartial ideals. By mediating ethical and political discourse among people from diverse backgrounds, social media challenges the basis of the Western traditional conceptions of moral reasoning where the rational agent arrives at a moral point of view by abstracting from the particularities of the circumstances in which moral reasoning occurs.

3 In response to this issue, David Kaye (2022) has argued that social media platforms should adopt global standards applicable across their platforms.

Furthermore, the discussion on social media's conceptual disruption indicates that social media disrupts fundamental political concepts and basic legal ideals. This has important implications for debates on security and legal frameworks. As we have seen, the transnational aspect of the new public sphere erodes the possibility of democratic self-government. From a legal perspective, this raises the question of whether social media has altered the fundamental concept of sovereignty. The transnational aspect of the public sphere hinders the ability of governments to provide security to their citizens from external influence. This does not have only negative implications; in some instances, the inability of governments to enforce their tight control has facilitated the protection of dissidents' human rights. For example, in January 2013, a form of 'WikiLeaks' under the handle Baba Jukwa was rapidly established as a major source of online political news in Zimbabwe. Operating under anonymity enabled by encryption, the handle published riveting reports about state corruption and was followed by over 100,000 people. Reportedly, the government undertook an intense campaign to find the poster's identity including approaching Facebook without success. According to Karekwaivanane, 'Baba Jukwa was able to convoke an "unruly public" that was situated in opposition to the state-controlled public sphere, and one that was transnational in its reach' (Karekwaivanane, 2019: 1).

Finally, the discussion on the social disruption of democratic politics by social media shows that social media has dramatically altered political methodologies. Not only has the digitalization of politics changed how many voters around the world form their political preferences, but it has also pressured other key political agents to adopt different strategies for political action. The use of social media by political leaders has pressured them into adopting different communicative strategies to reach out to voters and mobilize their supporters, critically affecting their agenda. Political activism too has gone through a significant transformation, as was described earlier through the new logic of connective action. The digitalization of politics has led political activists to adapt their demonstration and resistance tactics to maximize public outreach through the internet.

Further listening

Readers who would like to learn more about the topics discussed in this chapter might be interested in listening to this episodes of the ESDiT podcast (https://anchor.fm/esdit):

Elena Ziliotti on 'Confucianism and social media technologies': https://podcasters.spotify.com/pod/show/esdit/episodes/Elena-Ziliotti-on-Confucianism-and-Social-Media-Technologies-e203lol

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